

THE HEART OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By

ALBERT H. GRIFFITH, A. M.



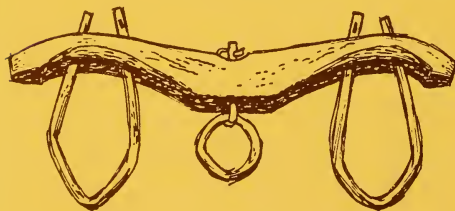
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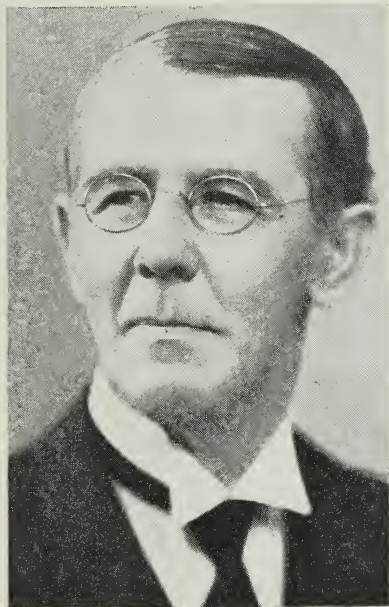
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FOREWORD

The author of the accompanying appreciation of Abraham Lincoln—Albert H. Griffith, A. M.—is a resident of Fisk, Winnebago County, Wisconsin. From its first year the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin has numbered him in its membership. Although engaged in farming as a lifelong vocation, he has had an engaging avocation—the study of the life of Abraham Lincoln—to add strength and substance to the virtues that have their root in the tilling of the soil.

Mr. Griffith's most noteworthy work has been as a collector of Lincolniana. This began before 1900. During the latter part of his life he has devoted great attention to the assembling of printed material pertaining to the Civil War president. His collection was strong in books, pamphlets, magazine, newspaper and periodical articles. He has also been a lecturer on Lincoln and antiquities at Ripon College. His Lincoln studies led him into the larger field of Civil War history and American history, and finally into that of world history. He extended and enlarged his collecting activities, and built up large general historical collections. The supreme treasure of this larger collection is an original leaf from the Gutenberg Bible. He also has a complete set of the autographs of the Presidents of the United States.



Mr. Griffith's circle of Lincoln correspondents through the years has been very large, and includes all the great Lincoln collectors and many students and authors. He has had an extensive correspondence with the "Big Six" Lincoln collectors—Major William H. Lambert, Judd Stewart, Charles W. McLellan, Judge Daniel Fish, Joseph B. Oakleaf, and John E. Burton, and with many of the others. He assisted Oakleaf in the compilation of his Lincoln Bibliography. He furnished William E. Barton with data for certain chapters of his life of Lincoln and he read the final proof sheets of that work.

Mr. Griffith has published two monographs, "Lincoln Literature, Lincoln Collections, and Lincoln Collectors," and "The Message of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address for Today." He has an unpublished book entitled "The Religion of Abraham Lincoln."

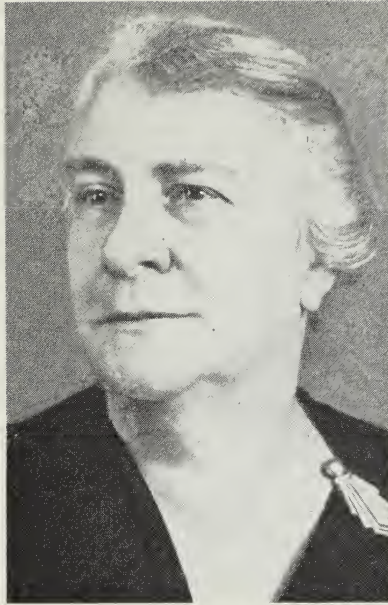
Mr. Griffith entered the preparatory department of Ripon College and thereafter Ripon College, from which he was graduated, with the degree of

Bachelor of Arts, in 1898. In 1906, following advanced work at Ripon, he received the degree of Master of Arts. As early as 1890 he was licensed to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in which he has held many responsible posts, although not adopting the ministry as a profession.

Of Welsh extraction, Mr. Griffith is interested in the local history of the Welsh people and has done extensive research along this line. He contributed a supplemental chapter to "The History of the Oshkosh Welsh Settlement, 1847-1947," originally written and published in the Welsh language, in 1897 and 1898, by the Rev. David Davies of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and translated into English and published, with supplementary material, in June, 1947, by his son, the Rev. Howell D. Davies, of Oak Park, Illinois.

Mr. Griffith's work in Lincolniana is done at Bonnie View Farm, across the road from the house where he was born. He receives mail from Rural Route 2, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

"The Heart of Abraham Lincoln" is the text of one of several addresses given frequently by its author. It was especially admired by Mrs. Griffith, who shared in these proclivities and made contributions of her own to Lincolniana in writings and in group discussion. Of her part in his lifelong quest Mr. Griffith noted, "She endured the hardships of being the wife of a Lincoln student and collector and sacrificed with me in order that this Lincoln work might be done."



This address is dedicated to the memory of my wife, Myrtie M. Griffith, who passed away on September 8, 1946.

—Albert H. Griffith

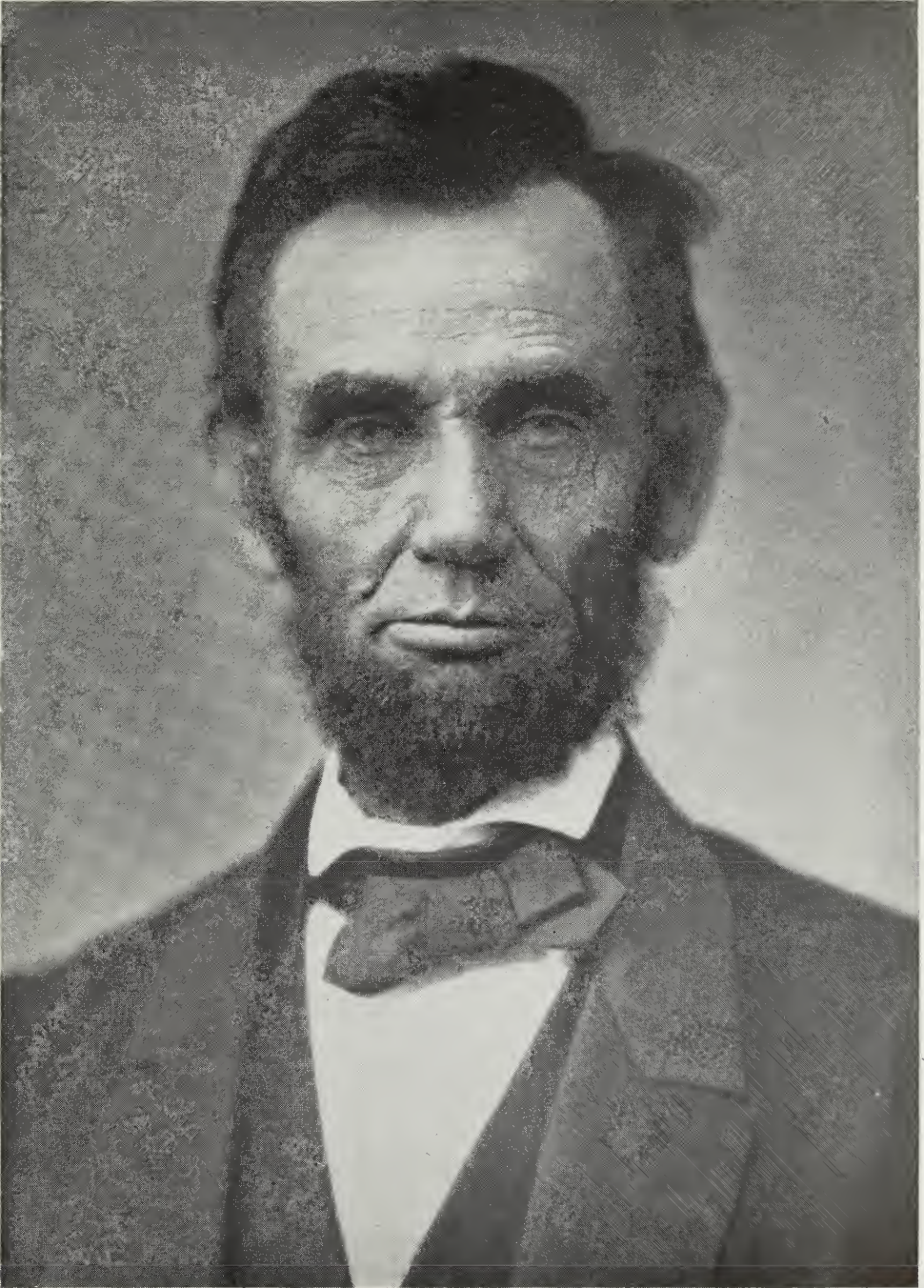
The accompanying photograph of Abraham Lincoln (probably Meserve 59), from the collection of Albert H. Griffith, has a rather unusual history and is one that nearly passed into oblivion. In making it available for reproduction here, Mr. Griffith supplies these explanatory extracts from letters written by Amos Stephenson:

Syracuse, New York, Sept. 5, 1931

As near as I can find out, this photograph of Abraham Lincoln was found in an old empty house. It was used for filling in the back of a Currier and Ives print, dated 1846. I purchased three of the prints. In taking them out of the frames I found this picture in the back of one of them.

Syracuse, New York, Sept. 21, 1931

I bought this Lincoln photograph under a Currier and Ives print. The party who owned the picture moved away, I do not know where. These pictures were left in a lot of rubbish, and an old rag picker had them and some other things he was hauling away to the dump. I bought them. * * * The Lincoln picture was found in a surrounding small town—Manlius, in New York state, a short distance from Syracuse.



THE HEART OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

MAN OF KINDNESS AND MERCY



By ALBERT H. GRIFFITH, A. M.

Through the lines of master poets runs an oft repeated line.
Through the works of great musicians runs an oft repeated strain.
Through the books of deepest thinkers runs an oft repeated thought.
Through the lives of greatest men runs an oft repeated note.

The oft repeated note, the dominating note of Lincoln's entire life, was kindness and mercy. Lincoln was the Great Heart of all American history.

We find this quality of kindness in his boyhood. When, for example, the Lincoln family was moving to Illinois, after crossing an ice-filled stream with their heavy wagon and clumsy oxen, they discovered that a little dog had been left behind on the other side of the stream. The boy Lincoln pulled off his shoes and socks and waded through the icy cold water to rescue the shivering animal.

Years later, when Lincoln was riding his law circuit, he left his companions, hitched his horse and strode around in the underbrush to catch two young birds which had fallen from their nest and were fluttering on the ground. He caught them, hunted from tree to tree until he found the nest from which they had fallen, and placed them again in a place of safety.

An hour or so later, upon overtaking his friends he heard them laughing at this childish way of wasting time.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you may laugh, but I couldn't have slept well to-night, if I had not saved those little birds. Their cries and those of their distracted mother would have rung in my ears."

Throughout his life Lincoln was kind to the friendless, the needy, and the obscure. Incidents of this kind are legion. During the time when he was a captain in the Black Hawk War he heard some of his men belaboring a forlorn, helpless old Indian, preparing to string him up as a spy. The settlers in those days had no love for Indians. They did not hesitate to express their belief that the "only good Indian is the dead Indian." The helpless old Indian harassed by Lincoln's men showed them a pass, but, notwithstanding, they hustled him along and threatened him until their tall captain sprang out among them, his eyes blazing with indignation, his voice trembling with anger, as he shouted, "Fall back, men; fall back! Let the Indian go. He hasn't done anything, he couldn't hurt you if he tried."

"Say, captain," said one of the soldiers, "that ain't fair. We know what we're doin'."

"Let this old man go," said Lincoln. "If you want to hurt somebody, take it out o' me. I'll fight you all, but you shan't hurt a helpless Indian. When a man comes to me for help he's going to get it, if I have to lick the whole of Sangamon County."

The big captain's challenge was not accepted. One of the men of that day, knowing the bitter enmity between the early western settler and the red man, said that Captain Lincoln saved the life of that Indian from the hatred of these lawless recruits at the risk of his own life.

In his young manhood it was said of him, in practical paraphrase of the scriptural definition of "pure religion and undefiled," that he used to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," and—chop their wood!

During the Civil War he was wont to say, "If the man has no friends, I'll be his friend."

Among a large number of persons in the reception room waiting to speak with President Lincoln on a certain day in November, 1864, was a thirteen-year old boy. Mr. Lincoln saw him standing, looking feeble and faint, and said, "Come here, my boy, and tell me what you want." The boy advanced, placed his hand on the arm of the President's chair, and with bowed head and timid accents said, "Mr. President, I have been a drummer boy in a regiment for two years. My colonel got angry with me and turned me off. I was taken sick and have been in hospital for a long time. The surgeon in the hospital says I must leave. This is the first time I have been out, and I came to see if you could do something for me. I have no home, no mother, no father, no brother or sister, and"—bursting into tears—"no friends; nobody cares for me."

With tears in his own eyes, the President took out one of his cards and wrote on it, "Take care of this poor boy," and addressed it to an official to whom his request was law, saying as he handed it to the boy, "There, my little man, you will find someone who will care for you."

Lincoln's kindness to this little drummer boy is only one illustration of his kindness to all the soldiers. He was the friend of the common soldier. Nothing that concerned the life of the men in the line was foreign to him. He never forgot those under sentence of death. A man might have shown cowardice. The President only said, "I never felt sure but I might drop my gun and run away if I found myself in line of battle." The man might be poor and friendless. Lincoln said, "If he has no friend, I'll be his friend." The man might have deserted. "Suspend execution; send me his record," was the President's order. Such telegrams were sent out on days of great battles, in the midst of victory, in the despair of defeat. Whatever he was doing, the fate of the sentenced soldier was on his heart.

This quality of kindness in Lincoln's character was not confined to bursts of enthusiasm on special occasions. It was the everyday habit of his life. Years after Lincoln's death, William H. Herndon, his friend and law partner for many years, and his biographer, traveled about in Indiana and Illinois interviewing people who had known Lincoln as he grew from boyhood into youth and manhood. Herndon collected a great store of reminiscences and anecdotes. Many of these anecdotes show acts of kindness very unusual in a boy or youth. And while very many acts of kindness are thus recorded in Mr. Herndon's collection of anecdotes, the particularly noteworthy fact in these narratives is that Lincoln had impressed his friends and neighbors as being "kind," and that they did so remember him. In these reminiscences of Lincoln's early days he is constantly described as being "obliging." And a name for being obliging in country parlance is gained, and can only be gained by willingly doing things for others that they want done, and doing them habitually.

One of his neighbors said, "Lincoln was always ready to do everything for everybody." Mr. Littlefield, a clerk in Lincoln's law office in Springfield, said, "When you first met him and studied him, he impressed you as being a very kind man. He struck you as a man who would go out of his way to serve you. I never in all my life associated with a man who seemed so ready to serve another." His kindness was shown particularly in his relation with his brother lawyers. Judge David Davis, than whom nobody was better qualified to speak, said, "Lincoln was loved by his brethren of the bar."

And from these neighbors and associates who loved him, Lincoln went to Washington to assume the great responsibilities of war-President. There he was constantly engrossed in great affairs, working to the limit of his strength, full of troubles, often very anxious, often greatly perplexed and cruelly harassed, almost all the time very tired, and part of the time, at least, run down physically and near the breaking point. What about his attitude then? Was he too irritable, too busy, to be obliging?

Turn anywhere in his life in Washington and you come across this same deep kindness of manner and act. Men and women, politicians, office-seekers, friends and enemies came to see him to ask favors, to criticize wisely or foolishly, sometimes to find fault. Many were importunate; many were trying; few were pleasant. Yet to all who came—and they poured in on him every day, all day long and even at night, without ceasing, for over four long years—he showed almost unvarying kindness in face, in manner, in word and act.

This is confirmed in a very striking way. There is a book containing forty-five narratives by various persons of their meetings with Lincoln. In fifteen of these the word "kind" or "kindness" or "kindly" is used in speaking of Lincoln's demeanor. In twenty-two others, equivalent or synonymous phrases are used. There remain only eight, and all these relate to some matter in which mention of his kindness would not be pertinent. This is a most remarkable agreement among witnesses. I do not know where to find its parallel, especially since

these witnesses are of all sorts, classes, professions, and characters. They include George William Curtis, the editor; General O. O. Howard; Secretary Seward's son; Frank B. Carpenter, the portrait painter; Grace Greenwood, a bright and intelligent woman; public officials, congressmen, privates and officers in the army.

Charles A. Dana, in his "Recollections of the Civil War," says, "I never heard Lincoln say a harsh word to anybody. I never heard him speak a word of complaint even. I never heard him say an unkind thing about anybody. He would never allow the wants of any man or woman to go unattended to, if he could help it."

NOTE: That this absence of unkindness was an habitual characteristic of Lincoln is confirmed in a striking way by the Lincoln Papers bequeathed to the Library of Congress by Robert T. Lincoln, and recently released to the public. Dr. C. Percy Powell, of the Library of Congress, indexed all these papers and knew their contents. Dr. Powell testified that there is not in these papers a single unkind remark about anyone written by Lincoln himself.

Lincoln's own words are the keynote of his life: "I want it said of me by those who know me best that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow." Some shepherds of men have been too busy to be kind. Lincoln was so busy being kind that often he had little time for anything else.

If you, if I, should be charged with some serious crime, arrested, and thrown in jail, how many real friends would we have tomorrow? In the gray dawn of the early morning how many, how few, would hasten to the jail to stand by us? How many would say, "I always suspicioned there was something wrong with that man. I am not much surprised. He didn't ring true."

The world has compliments, praise, applause, support, for the successful, the prosperous, the victorious. It has neglect, obloquy, ostracism, unkindness, kicks, for the defeated, the down and out. One test of a man's kindness and mercy is the way he treats the defeated in life's battles.

Lincoln was kind and merciful to everyone, even to those of another race, a hated race, with no friends, no influence, no "standing."

During August and September, 1862, a band of Sioux Indians and half-breeds, led by Little Crow, attacked the white settlers in southwestern Minnesota. Most of the able-bodied white men were in the Union army, leaving the scattered homesteads occupied by women and children and old people. Little Crow's band butchered nearly five hundred whites, mostly women and children. Waxing in numbers, the Indians besieged Fort Ridgely and Fort Abercrombie, two outposts with slender garrisons. General H. H. Sibley rallied the militia, and in the battle of Wood Lake, on September 23, 1862, routed the Indians.

killing hundreds and capturing five hundred prisoners. There followed a trial of the captured Indians by a military commission at St. Paul. From all over the West arose a cry for vengeance. It was true that the Indians had been incited to the uprising by Rebel sympathizers over the Canadian border, and on that account there might be grounds for mercy. But in general everyone seemed to want to have a "lesson" taught to the Indians.

General Sibley and his associates were engaged for weeks in the trial of the Indians. One day there came over the wires to the War Department at Washington a message from General Sibley that his court had found guilty and sentenced to death three hundred three Indians.

Lincoln, from the time he received this message from the hands of the telegraphers in the War Department, seemed shocked at the sweeping character of the findings, and shook his head ominously when he was urged to make "short work" of the redskins. With a recollection of the time during the Black Hawk War when he himself, a captain, had saved an innocent Indian from lynching, Lincoln now put his mind on the Minnesota trial and its results. He ordered all the papers sent to Washington.

Nothing illustrates better the humanity and justice of Lincoln than his handling of this matter. He was overburdened with the task of conducting the President's part of a great war, and depressed by successive disasters to the Northern troops. This was the dark year of 1862 with its terrible defeats for the Union armies. Despite this, Lincoln insisted that justice must be done to the Indians, and that the death sentence should be carried into effect only when positive proof warranted. So he sifted the evidence submitted to the military commission and at the end of it all he confirmed the sentence of death of only thirty-nine of the three hundred three, and directed that the rest of the three hundred three be held subject to further orders, care being taken that they neither escape nor be subjected to any unlawful violence.

This order he drew up in his own handwriting and sent to General Sibley. Let it never be forgotten that the same Lincoln who struck the shackles from four millions of black men also saved the lives of more than two hundred and fifty red men, against whom cries for vengeance and execution were rising on every hand.

To my mind, this stands as one of the most remarkable examples of Lincoln's mercy and kindheartedness. The Indians had no friends, no votes, no political influence whatever. He had nothing to gain, and much to lose, by his clemency. But he was the same Great Heart in the White House that he was on the prairies of Illinois and in the Black Hawk campaign. The pleas of the innocent old Indian, the distress of the little dog, the cries of the little birds fallen from the nest, the petitions of anxious mothers, the sobs of little children, the pleas of those under sentence of death—these never ceased to ring in his ears at night.

Jesus introduced a new principle into the world: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you.'" (Matt. 5:43,44).

The acid test of a man's kindheartedness is the way he treats his enemies. It is very difficult to conduct a long war without malice, without hatred. Among the many leaders of his day Lincoln almost alone stood this acid test. He was kind and merciful even to the Southerners—the enemies of the Union. In the poignant story of one of his visits to military hospitals is found a characteristic picture of the wartime President's love for the Southern as for the Northern soldier:

It was on the last Saturday of September, 1862, after the second battle of Bull Run. The forty-odd hospitals in Washington were filled with the sick and wounded soldier boys of both contending armies, the wounded Union and Confederate soldiers lying side by side on adjoining cots.

Early that morning President Lincoln left the White House, determined if possible to visit every hospital in the city before the day was done, in order that he might bring to the sick, the wounded, and the dying the comfort and consolation of his own presence. And so, early in the morning, beginning at Georgetown University Hospital, in the far western end of the city of Washington, he continued all day on his tour of mercy and love. Late in the afternoon, when the sun was fading over the western hills, he knelt beside the cot of a Confederate soldier boy in the Navy Yard Hospital, in the eastern end of the city, and there he prayed for the badly wounded lad, little more than a child, who lay dying.

Then, weary and worn, the tired President stepped into a waiting carriage. There came a nurse calling to him to say that the dying Confederate lad was pleading to see him again. Then, perhaps, that radiance lighted up the face of the weary Lincoln, that radiance which some have described as having seen on his face on some occasions, that light which never was on land or sea. Weary and worn though he was, he returned at once to the dying lad's bedside, and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"I am so lonely and friendless, Mr. Lincoln," whispered the lad, "and I am hoping that you can tell me what my mother would want me to say and do now."

"Yes, my boy," said Lincoln, as he again knelt beside the dying lad, "I know exactly what your mother would want you to say and do. And I am glad that you sent for me to come back to you. Now, as I kneel here, please repeat the words with me."

Then, while the lad, thus facing eternity with recollections of a good mother, rested his head upon the arm of Abraham Lincoln, he repeated after his only

present friend the words that his mother, then praying at home for her boy, had taught him to say at her knees before bedtime:

Now I lay me down to sleep;
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
And this I ask for Jesus' sake."

There was silence, there were tears, in that great hospital ward. All could hear the simple prayer of Lincoln. And as the dying day ended in the western sky, the life of that home-loved boy of the Southland also ended, his body lying in the arms of Abraham Lincoln, who knew no North, who knew no South—the Great Heart of all American history.

When the fields of a nation were tinged with blood, when the demons of war stalked with hellish glee over the ruins of blooming gardens, golden harvests and thriving hamlets, when the backbone of the rebellion had been broken and victory was in his grasp; when men were thirsting for vengeance on a defeated foe, when they were about to lay stripes deep and long on the bare backs of a rebellious people; when the fiery and eloquent Henry Winter Davis, the stern, downright Ben Wade and the unforgiving Thaddeus Stevens were demanding retaliation, confiscation, death, desolation, and bloody execution, the voice of Lincoln rose clear above the storm—firm, gentle, but powerful, like the voice of God:

With malice toward none,
With charity for all.

These are the words of Lincoln's immortal Second Inaugural.

"Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you." The words of Jesus were the vision of Lincoln.

Only a few days before Lincoln's death he was shown through the war hospitals in Washington by a young Union officer. When their visit to the Union wards was finished the officer started to leave the building.

"Who are in those wards over there?" asked Lincoln.

"O, Mr. President, those are only Rebels, you don't want to see them."

President Lincoln laid his great hand upon the young officer's shoulder. The latter never forgot this all the rest of his life, as Lincoln said,

"You mean Confederates."

Not Rebels, but Confederates. And so they went through the Confederate wards together, and Mr. Lincoln spoke just as friendly and shook hands just as cordially with the Southern boys as with the Northern boys.

A telegram announcing that General Lee was about to surrender came to the White House during the last stormy days of the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln left Washington immediately to go to the front, and when news finally reached him that Lee had surrendered, and the officials began to make preparation for the entry into Richmond, just as immediately Lincoln put his foot down and said, "There shall be no triumphal entry into Richmond. There shall be no demonstration."

He made his way into Richmond and walked through the city almost alone, with only a small guard of sailors. There never was such a triumphal entry into a beaten city in all the annals of history. The President walked with his head down, with heavy step and sad heart, and when he reached the Southern capitol and went to Jefferson Davis' own room, he bade his two officials to step aside and leave him alone. After a few minutes had passed, one of them looked in to see what had taken place. There sat Lincoln, his head bowed on Jefferson Davis' desk, his face in his hands and his tears falling. He loved the North, yes, but he loved the South. He was the Father Abraham of all the sons of America.

Lincoln was a great statesman, a great war President, a great thinker, a great writer, and a great speaker. He will ever rank in American history, next to Washington, as the greatest American. But he will live forever in the hearts of men everywhere because he had a great heart, because he loved men.

David Lloyd George paid this great tribute to Lincoln: "Lincoln belongs to mankind in every race, in every clime, in every age."

John Drinkwater took his pen and wrote: "Lincoln is now more than a man. He is a hope in the heart of every man."

An illiterate laborer on my neighbor's farm, coming from Russia, made this startling comparison some years ago: "Jesus Christ was for the poor people just like Abraham Lincoln was."

When the Lincoln funeral train was passing through Albany, New York, a Negro woman lifted her little boy high above the heads of the crowd and said,

"Take a long, long look, honey; he died for you."

And so, when his work was done, Great Heart Lincoln went up to God, broken hearted over the burdens and the heartaches of the millions of his fellow countrymen, stricken with the woes and sorrows of the countless widows and orphans—crepe on every door and mourning in every household. Great Heart Lincoln went up to God with millions of broken fetters in his hands, with the ever increasing love and gratitude of a united nation, with the respect of the entire civilized world, with the veneration of the downtrodden and the oppressed in every land, in every clime—deathless, forevermore.

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